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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR NEAR EAST

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FAO results in the Near East and North Africa – 2020-21

Executive Summary

Over the 2020-21 biennium, FAO has taken significant steps toward reorienting its programme of work in NENA countries to better contribute to agrifood system transformation and the SDG targets related to food and agriculture. This includes the focus on four interconnected regional priorities, the introduction of new working modalities and innovative initiatives at the regional and country level. This document highlights some of the most salient results and achievements made over the 2020-21 period while distilling key lessons learned.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to call upon Members to:

- a) Take note of the progress made in re-orienting FAO's programme of work in the region to achieve more inclusive, sustainable, resilient and nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems.
- b) Provide feedback on the achievements and success of new working modalities and initiatives implemented and the lessons learned for the coming biennium.

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Introduction

1. This document presents major developments and principal results achieved in the region during the 2020-21 biennium. It also highlights FAO's new ways of working, modalities and initiatives introduced in 2020-21 to contribute to supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to MORE efficient inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind.
2. Since the arrival of Director-General QU Dongyu in August 2019, FAO has undergone deep transformative actions to ensure that FAO is fit-for-purpose to face the challenges that lie ahead. FAO has introduced a modular and flexible structure that allows for optimal cross-sectoral collaboration and aims for a stronger and coordinated focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among the changes introduced are: the new Office of Innovation to consolidate and strengthen FAO's innovative spirit; the new Office of SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs¹ to ensure that the special needs of these vulnerable populations and countries are met; the new Office of SDGs which coordinates the corporate engagement in the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review; and FAO's new position of Chief Scientist which ensures robustness, breadth and independence of scientific approaches in FAO's work.
3. The reforms introduced also aim at modernizing FAO and improving its methods of work and transparency, including through the establishment of the Core Leadership team, comprised of the three Deputy Directors-General, the Chief Economist and Chief Scientist and the Director of Cabinet.
4. In 2020-21, FAO rapidly transitioned to a fully digital Organization, further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the expanded use of cloud solutions and the introduction of new technologies facilitating the work of the Organization from any location and paving the way for the "new normal". Virtual meetings of the Governing Bodies, including the Regional Conferences in 2020, allowed governance processes to proceed smoothly, with interpretation provided in all FAO languages.
5. Furthermore, during the biennium, a number of key corporate initiatives were introduced, such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative (HIHI), which is FAO's evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development in support of the SDGs, and the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme which appeals for immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis.
6. In 2020-21, FAO fully aligned its country-level planning with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) process, thus building on the UN development system (UNDS) efforts to collectively support country ownership and address national SDG priorities and gaps. At the same time, FAO's country level process also contributes to shaping the formulation of the UNSDCF, thus ensuring that agrifood system transformation concerns and related SDGs are well integrated and prioritized in the UN common planning documents.
7. Following the 35th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East held in 2020, FAO focused its work in the region through the following Regional Priorities:
 - Regional Priority 1: Rural transformation for youth employment and income;
 - Regional Priority 2: Developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all;
 - Regional Priority 3: Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and implementing climate action;
 - Regional Priority 4: Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations.

¹ Small Island Developing States (SIDS); Least Developed Countries (LDCs); Land-Locked Developing Countries (LLDCs)

8. These Regional Priorities served as a mechanism for delivery at country level, facilitating greater impact of FAO's work on the key priorities in each region under the results framework for the biennium as presented in the [Updated Results Framework 2020-21](#).

9. The next section describes achievements of the region in 2020-21, focusing on corporate and regional priorities in the context of FAO's work. The section also highlights relevant cross-cutting themes and thematic areas important for ensuring the quality and integrity of FAO's work.

I. Achievements in the region

10. The previous biennium has witnessed a number of important achievements at both regional and country level following the introduction and implementation of key initiatives by the FAO Director-General and re-formulation of regional priorities to better respond to Members' needs. While not exhaustive, the following sections capture key results realized through i) the introduction of new ways of working; ii) notable partnerships and cross-cutting approaches; and iii) revised regional priorities.

A. FAO's new ways of working, modalities and programmes

Hand-in-Hand Initiative

11. FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative strives to facilitate agrifood systems transformation and sustainable rural development accelerated through targeting the poorest and the hungry, differentiating territories and strategies and bringing together all relevant dimensions through analysis and partnerships. Launched in July 2020, FAO's Hand-in-Hand Geospatial Platform is a digital public good to facilitate partnerships and provide advanced geo-spatial modelling and analytics, to identify real-time gaps and opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of rural populations. The Sudan, Syria and Yemen are the NENA countries currently engaged in this initiative.

12. **Yemen** - The HIHI in Yemen is proving relevant support to bridge humanitarian efforts with longer-term development investments. So far, the HIHI process has started a diagnostic phase that concentrates on "investment-oriented diagnostics" and a georeferenced portal; a planning phase, to establish a new policy and investment framework and the drafting of a National Agriculture Strategy and Agriculture Investment Plan; and capacity development. The HIHI is supporting the consistency of national planning through dialogues with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Fisheries, and will improve alignment and harmonization of development partners to nationally agreed investment priorities. Since its starting, the FAO Representation in Yemen has been mobilizing International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and donor resources, to start attending established interim priorities.

13. **The Sudan** – A key objective of the HIHI in the Sudan is to support national programmes to accelerate progress toward inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems development and rural transformation. A technical task force has been organized with participation of government technical focal points and an initial set of thematic entry points has been identified. These reflect national priorities and include livestock sector development that would feature slaughterhouses and processing facilities for sheep, meat and dairy products, but also support services such as extension and vaccination programmes. In the crop sector, priorities include value chain development (sorghum, groundnuts), distribution of seeds, water management and irrigation, financial services as well as innovative practices for energy generation (i.e. solar infrastructure). Through the HIHI Geospatial Platform an initial set of multicriteria decision analyses have been conducted to identify possible locations for interventions. Economic, financial and social return analysis of these interventions are underway.

14. **Syria** - A technical task force with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MoAAR) and the FAO Representation in Syria has been established and a higher-level national team for the overall coordination of the initiative is currently under preparation, to include representatives from all key line ministries. Five training courses have been held (October-November 2021) to build the technical capacity at MoAAR to collect, analyse and integrate data and its various aspects for natural resources (as well as for socio-economic) analysis. Maps have been produced by the FAO water team (land capabilities for rainfed farming, long-term annual precipitation; and suitability maps for the rehabilitation of ground water wells) and three potential areas have been identified as locations for future investment – E. Ghoutta in Rural Damascus; Al Ghab in Hama, and Acar plain near the Lebanese border in Tartus. Work will continue to develop investment opportunities at these locations, with Round Table discussions planned for the first quarter of 2022 to select specific subsectors and/or value chains based on the investment criteria developed by the technical team.

15. It is also notable that the United Arab Emirates has taken action to mobilize technical support for HIHI countries including Zimbabwe, Haiti and Liberia. In Liberia the collaboration is the first of its kind as it will bring together FAO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and a leading private sector agriculture company.

1000 Digital Villages Initiative

16. FAO's 1000 Digital Villages Initiative (DVI) aims to convert 1000 villages across the world into digital hubs - with the aim of supporting the transformation of agrifood systems, as well as supporting existing and potential digital villages in their quest to advance and improve livelihoods, agriculture, nutrition, health and well-being of their citizens. The Initiative incorporates three main elements: "e-Agriculture" to improve agricultural productivity through ICT and digital solutions, such as climate smart, precision and intelligent facility agriculture; "Digital Farmer Services" to enhance farmers' access to services, including financial services, social protection and employment; and digital services for "Rural transformation".

17. In the NENA region, the DVI has been rolled out in seven countries through the Regional Innovation Flagship (RIF). In Egypt, the DVI is supporting the scale up and increased use of the *Al-Mufeed* digital extension application through 170 Farmer Field Schools to be implemented in Upper Egyptian villages in collaboration with the national Decent Life Initiative.² In Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, FAO is working with government counterparts to develop e-agriculture strategies. Digital village pilots are planned in Morocco and Tunisia and are already underway in Mauritania. Activities include ICT and digital literacy training for youth and implementation of e-commerce applications linking small-holders to buyers. In Jordan, FAO is working to create a multipurpose digital platform for agriculture services in addition developing an e-agriculture national strategy.

One Country - One Priority Product (OCOP)

18. In September 2021, FAO launched its Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products: One Country One Priority Product, aiming to develop sustainable value chains for Special Agricultural Products (SAPs), support small and family farmers reap the full benefits of a global market, and ultimately help the transformation of current agrifood systems and the achievement of the SDGs.

19. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, fish and aquatic resources have always played a major role in the lives of people in the Arabian Peninsula. However, today the majority of the aquatic food consumed in the GCC states comes from imports. Aquaculture presents an important opportunity for rebuilding local food production, whether in freshwater, brackish water or marine water. Through the OCOP initiative, FAO's Subregional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council

² https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/16/98286/percentE2_percent80_percent98Decent-Life_percentE2_percent80_percent99-initiative-seeks-volunteers-for-project-to-develop-Egypt_percentE2_percent80_percent99s

States and Yemen (FAO SNG) is supporting the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain through a multipronged programme to support aquaculture production as a priority product.

COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme

20. The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme appeals for immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis. The Programme aims to mitigate the immediate impacts while strengthening the longer-term resilience of livelihoods, moving towards a green recovery, and building to transform agrifood systems. FAO's response to the pandemic leverages the Organization's convening power, real-time data, early warning systems and technical expertise to direct support where and when it is most needed.

21. The region responded directly with agility to provide a range of support to Country Offices such as forming a COVID-19 Task Force, mobilizing internal and external resources for monitoring and assessment activities, and engaging in regional and multistakeholder dialogue around crisis impacts and response. RNE and Decentralized Offices across the region showed adaptability and resourcefulness, evidenced by successful programme delivery and resource mobilization rates. A standout result has been strengthened collaboration and partnership among FAO and Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), UN Country Teams, the World Bank, and others in a timely, efficient and responsive manner, which has shown positive effects on FAO positioning at country-level and potential for resource mobilization.

22. A regional portfolio of actions to respond and recover from COVID-19 was developed as a basis for regional action, by mainstreaming COVID-19 response and recovery, as well as strengthening resilience to future shocks, within the four regional priorities.

B. Notable partnerships, innovation and cross-cutting themes

Key partnerships in the region

23. FAO, in collaboration with its Tripartite partners, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO), is establishing a regional Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Multistakeholder Partnership Platform with the purpose to bring stakeholders across the human-animal, plant-environment interface together to strengthen the implementation of the Global Action Plan on AMR (GAP). A Virtual Learning Centre (RNE-VLC) is also being established in the region to take account of training needs in countries with the objective of proposing tailored solutions.

24. LAS has been an invaluable partner to FAO in the area of food security and nutrition. Under this partnership and through a regional Technical Cooperation Programme project (TCP), FAO is providing technical support for the Subcommittee for Ending Hunger, established by LAS, focusing on the development of a Zero Hunger initiative in the region to support countries to achieve SDG 2. Following broad consultations, seven strategic priorities to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG 2 and related targets under other SDGs in the region were identified. These have been endorsed by the Subcommittee for Ending Hunger and will be approved by the Economic and Social Council for the Arab League in February 2022. They will set the basis for a Regional Zero Hunger Initiative coordinated by LAS with the support of FAO and other stakeholders in the region. This comes at a time when hunger and malnutrition are on the rise again, affecting more than 40.2 million people across the region.

25. FAO is increasing private sector engagement to achieve SDG 2. For example, to unlock private and public investments for the transformation of the Palestinian agrifood system, FAO supported the formulation and execution of the National Investment Plan (NIP) for Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) 2020-2022. Against a total envelope of USD 488 million, the NIP attracted investments of USD 114 million during 2020. Within the wider umbrella of the NIP, FAO directly supported capital formation for almost USD 20 million under 275 private

investments, making them available on a competitive bases to micro, small and medium farmers and agribusiness, including 23 youth-led start-ups, cash grants for over USD 8.5 million.

26. In July 2021, FAO organized a dialogue with the private sector in the NENA region to identify opportunities for private sector engagement and action around the SDGs, and SDG 2 in particular. The discussion highlighted the large synergies and shared objectives around agrifood system transformation. It also marked the start of renewed and expanded collaboration with different categories of private sector actors: micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), large companies and financial institutions.

Statistics and cross-cutting themes

27. FAO has developed a structured programme to accelerate support to SDG monitoring and incorporation of statistics in the NENA region. Activities have included support to data collection for SDGs through the Agricultural Integrated Survey Programme (AGRISurvey) methodology and the Global Strategy Phase 2, and capacity development activities supporting implementation of the Agriculture Census and AGRISurvey in support of the farm based indicators SDGs 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.4.1. Capacity development and technical assistance for specific SDGs, including SDGs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 on food security, and SDG 14 indicators on sustainable fisheries. Further activities have enabled provision of five e-learning courses on SDG indicators into Arabic (in progress), including on water scarcity and food losses, in order to further communication and knowledge of SDGs and statistics within the region.

28. FAO has also continued to invest in the generation of data and knowledge about the gender gaps in agriculture and the solutions to overcome them. In 2020-21, Egypt, Lebanon, Mauritania, Palestine and the Sudan finalized comprehensive Country Gender Assessments of the Agriculture and Rural Sector in close collaboration with national counterparts. In 2021, FAO also partnered with WFP and CARE to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on gender equality and food security in Iraq and the Sudan. The study shed light on the needs of different population groups and confirmed the importance of collecting data disaggregated by gender and other relevant social dimensions (e.g. age, residency status, disability).

29. Efforts have been made to adopt standardized methodologies that can facilitate the consolidation of information at regional level and monitor progress over the years. This is the case of the methodology for gender-responsive water assessments developed in the context of the regional project Implementing the 2030 Agenda for water efficiency/productivity and water sustainability in the NENA countries, used for the analyses in Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia. The same methodology used for the COVID-19 impact assessment in Iraq and the Sudan in collaboration with CARE has also been applied in Yemen.

30. Because the availability of gender-relevant information does not automatically translate into gender-responsive policies and programmes, FAO has engaged with regional and national institutions working on women's empowerment, such as the Arab Women Organization or the National Council of Women in Egypt, to foster policy dialogue and leverage impact. The workshops held for the validation of the Country Gender Assessments in Egypt and Algeria offered the opportunity to strengthen the collaboration with the national gender machinery. At the regional level, the consultation on the new Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment, held by the Committee of the World Food Security (CFS), brought together numerous stakeholders, offering a platform to women, as experts and activists, to voice their demands for more gender-responsive food security and nutrition policies.

31. Numerous FAO initiatives at country level contributed specifically to the objectives set by the FAO Policy on Gender Equality. In Lebanon, Mauritania and Palestine, for example, FAO supported women's participation in agrifood value chains through an integrated package of technical, business and financial support. Based on the awareness that conflicts and crises have gender-differentiated impacts, specific assistance has been provided to support women's economic recovery in particularly fragile situations, through the provision of inputs and resources (such as seeds and small livestock) in Iraq, the Sudan, Syria and Yemen. In these projects, women are targeted not only as direct beneficiaries, but also in light of their key role in ensuring household and child nutrition. Interventions

in Oman, Tunisia and Yemen have focused on the establishment or strengthening of women's cooperatives and associations, not only as a means to provide improved access to market and resources, but also platforms for women's leadership.

32. Another cross-cutting theme that has become a growing part of FAO's approach in the region is innovation. In 2020-21, FAO successfully organized a webinar series on innovation in NENA agrifood systems. The webinars spanned a wide range of topics, including youth entrepreneurship, strengthening producer organizations, rural service provision, gender equality in agrifood and sustainable agriculture production – all through the lens of institutional and technological innovation. The rich multistakeholder discussions and knowledge exchange are captured in two synthesis reports which provide key policy and programme directions on leveraging innovation for rural transformation. As part of its work on innovation, FAO also engaged actively with several countries of the region as part of the 1000 Digital Villages Initiative (see above) and developed a draft regional digital innovation strategy to better respond to the needs and expectations from Members.

II. Key achievements around regional priorities in 2020-21

33. The previous Regional Conference saw the endorsement of the four priorities suggested by the FAO regional strategic thinking process; namely: (i) rural transformation for youth employment and income; (ii) developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all; (iii) greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action; and (iv) building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme was also approved to support Members' weather complex immediate and longer-term impacts of the pandemic on national agrifood systems. A programmatic response to COVID-19 in NENA emerged that is grounded in, and is a reflection of, FAO's results and priorities in the NENA region. Main results achieved under each of the four regional priorities are outlined below.

Rural transformation for youth employment and income

34. Within the framework of the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, FAO published a report on Strengthening efforts of agricultural stakeholders to address child labour in agriculture in the Near East and North Africa region. A regional mini course was organized on child labour and exposure to pesticides targeting agriculture ministries and agriculture stakeholders, as well as a broader regional consultation to identify concrete actions that can be implemented by respective partners. These regional actions were brought to the high-level Global Solutions Forum in November 2021.

35. The Youth in Arab Agrifood Systems (YAAFS) regional platform was launched under the umbrella of the World Food Forum and in collaboration with the UN Food Systems Summit and UN Major Group for Children and Youth. The platform connects youth and youth groups to implement a common agenda for action around agrifood system transformation. Coordinated by FAO, the regional youth agenda includes 38 actions to make agrifood systems more inclusive, sustainable and resilient. In parallel, a regional partnership was launched with Enactus, a global student organization focusing on social entrepreneurship, to provide technical and in-kind support to social enterprises in the agrifood sector implemented by university students in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. A total of 18 enterprises and community projects have been selected to receive support to continue and expand their activities.

36. In partnership with the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), FAO published the study, The state of social insurance for agricultural workers in the Near East and North Africa. The study examines the barriers for agricultural workers to participate in contributory schemes, highlighting good practices being adopted in NENA countries. The success of this publication led to a further collaboration, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), to develop a series of

policy briefs addressing the complex policy trade-offs facing governments in expanding social insurance coverage among agriculture workers.

37. FAO, together with the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) is mapping and analysing existing sustainable agriculture practices, to investigate gaps and increase the adoption and dissemination of these practices. The study covers the five main agroecological areas in Egypt to define sustainable agricultural practices for land and water management, integrated pest management, crop production, livestock and fisheries in addition to the impact of climate change on different agricultural subsectors.

38. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a multidonor agri-business development programme has successfully provided investment support to hundreds of small market-oriented producers and conducted rehabilitation works for wholesale central markets while improving managerial and operational capacity. In addition, the intervention has increased marketing capacities of agrifood traders to better access international and local markets. In Algeria, FAO has developed plans to strengthen the rosemary, carob and pine value chains as non-wood forest products as part of an effort to reduce rural poverty and improve livelihood opportunities for local forest populations. Using a similar approach in Iraq, FAO has supported the livestock, tomato and date value chains while also introducing climate adaptive technologies such as solar-powered groundwater pumping systems to address increasing water scarcity.

39. As part of FAO's work on producer organizations, 577 women and 44 men from 261 cooperatives in Lebanon were trained using the Cooperative Business School approach. CBS is a specialized training concept developed by the FAO Representation in Lebanon, based on the Farm Business School concept, to strengthen the capacities of the cooperatives and help them acquire business and management knowledge and skills needed to develop profitable and sustainable businesses. Training sessions were followed up with support to develop business plans for 150 of those cooperatives and groups in order to receive further support through cash or in-kind grants, cash for work and linkages to markets. Another best practice comes from Oman where FAO has published a study documenting the unique experience of Aflaj, where collective institutions manage land and water among small-scale farms and the role of social capital in the development of effective rural institutions.

Developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all

40. In June 2021, FAO published the Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2020. The report analysed recent trends in hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and their driving factors. The report also analysed the costs of healthy diets in the region and affordability. The lack of capacity of current agrifood systems to support healthy diets was identified as one of the major driving factors of current malnutrition trends, with high levels of stunting and overweight in children under five years of age and a rising trend in adult obesity in most NENA countries. The report highlighted the need for sustainable and resilient agrifood systems to ensure everyone has access to a healthy diet and identified a set of policy directions for adoption to bolster different agrifood system components.

41. A regional network on nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems in the NENA region was established to ensure effective, timely and well-coordinated support to Members. The main purpose of this network is to provide a regional platform, which facilitates and enhances knowledge sharing and innovation. The regional network connects different stakeholders working on agrifood system related interventions, encourages mutual learning and exchange of experience between the institutions and stakeholders and promotes South-South Cooperation. Several regional dialogues were organized to collect, analyse, consolidate and disseminate good transferable practices on nutrition-sensitive food systems at country and regional level.

42. A focused event on Healthy Diets that brought together several experts was organized during the regional stakeholder consultation in July 2021. The event focused on the issues of trade and its impact on current diets and nutrition in the region considering the high per capita dependency of the region on imported food. A study on "Food policies and its implications on overweight and obesity in selected countries in the NENA Region, was jointly conducted by the FAO Regional Office for the

Near East and North Africa (FAO RNE) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to assess various trade tools (with a special focus on fiscal policies and subsidies) applied by governments and how these trade tools are affecting overweight and obesity rates in selected countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan).

43. Several technical briefs were prepared to help stakeholders understand the interlinkages of nutrition with gender, climate change and food safety, including the importance of protecting and promoting healthy diets in emergency and conflict situations. In addition, school meal and nutrition promotion activities were implemented through the provision of technical assistance and implementation of national campaigns in Egypt and releasing technical briefs for scaling up and expanding school food and nutrition initiatives in the NENA Region. Technical support on healthy diets were provided to Members in Oman, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

44. As the region is heavily dependent on imported food, the Regional Office reinvigorated focus towards mainstreaming trade and investment to ensure food security and to transform agrifood systems. In this regard, the following specific actions were undertaken:

- launch of the FAO RNE “Dialogues on Trade” series, to support stakeholders, particularly policy professionals on using trade as an enabler for food security and agrifood systems transformation;
- establishing a Regional Network of Experts on Agriculture Trade, to act as a regional think tank on agriculture trade and related issues;
- beginning of a mapping exercise on digital technologies for food trade, to be followed in 2022 by country-level assessment and support on use of digital technologies for facilitating food and agriculture trade.

Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action

45. A regional report entitled Near East and North Africa Regional Forest Resources Assessment 2020 was published highlighting the extent, changes, trends and the main characteristics of the forests in the region.³ FAO is also finalizing the first edition of the NENA flagship report on The State of NENA’s Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture. The report presents comprehensive information and analyses on the current state, trends and challenges facing the two most important agricultural production factors in the region: land and water. A study on the effect of COVID-19 on non-wood forest products’ value chains was carried out and contributed to the discussions of the 25th Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission.

46. The Regional Office engaged in the review of the region’s State of Land and Water (SOLAW) through a comprehensive process bringing together partnering institutions including the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UN-Habitat, and the University of Bern. The forthcoming first edition of the State of Land and Water Resources for the NENA region will be published in the first quarter of 2022 and offer decision-makers up-to-date information on the status and trends in natural resources management in the region and response options.

47. Capacities on climate-smart agriculture were enhanced through the launch of an FAO e-training package on climate smart agriculture in Arabic and technical capacities of NENA climate change negotiators on agriculture strengthened, through i) the organization of a workshop on the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture in July 2020; and ii) Regional analysis of Nationally Determined Contributions in the NENA region. Support has been provided to 11 countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, the Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen) and Palestine to access financing for Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Adaptation Fund projects.

³ <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb7174en>

48. Business models for profitable and sustainable desert aquaculture for the UAE and the Kingdom of Bahrain were developed with support from FAO SNG. This is in addition to developing the capacity of Bahrain to locally produce their fish seed by supporting the design and implementation of a modern hatchery and preparing enabling environment with regards to biosecurity (guidelines for UAE farmers, national pathogen list and operating procedures for Bahrain).

49. The FAO Subregional Office for North Africa (FAO SNE) supported the ministerial policy dialogue for the launch of the Maghreb Regional Initiative on Non-conventional Water (IMENCO) and issued a policy brief ‘Towards a Maghreb Vision for Building Resilience to Drought.’ FAO SNE is also promoting solar powered irrigation systems in Libya. In 2021, a study was published providing an assessment of opportunities and challenges facing solar powered irrigation in Libya along with recommendations to reduce water used for agriculture and integrate conservation principles into water use and reuse policies. In the coming phase, the pilot systems should be made ready to be implemented on a large scale in relevant regions throughout the country.

50. Under the Water Scarcity Initiative, (WSI), support to the region was provided at two levels. At the national level, the initiative through the Water Efficiency, Productivity and Sustainability (WEPS) project assisted eight countries to enhance capacities on the use of tools and methods, which in turn strengthen the strategic planning of water resources management and decision-making processes towards greater productivity and sustainability. Areas of work include water accounting and auditing, water productivity, the water-energy-food nexus and crop water consumption, among others. At the regional level, the initiative supported the intergovernmental processes with an aim to strengthen the cross-sectoral coordination and policy coherence between water and agriculture. At the administrative level, the WSI, in partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD) and UN ESCWA, supported the third meeting of the High Level Joint Technical Committee for Water-Agriculture in October 2021. At the substantive level, the WSI supported the development of the 2019 Cairo Declaration, Action Plan, the draft guidelines on sustainable water allocation for agriculture and a discussion paper on the use of non-conventional water resources. Policy directions on the three issues will be discussed and adopted in the next meeting of the Joint (water-agriculture) Ministerial Council scheduled for the first quarter of 2022.

Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations

51. Under the “improved risk governance mechanisms” work stream, FAO supported countries, including Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon in the formulation of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies for the agriculture sector and contributed to the preparation of national agriculture strategies that included risk management in Egypt and the Sudan. A total of 15 national Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) profiles have been published online by FAO in addition to a chapter entitled Food Security Risks under Growing Water Scarcity in the DRR Regional Assessment Report produced by the UNDRR. FAO is also co-leading the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) at regional level together with WHO, with the aim of strengthening national capacities to effectively manage disaster risk.

52. In order to strengthen security and nutrition information and early warning, as the second stream of work, community based early warning systems were established in Iraq, Syria and Yemen and an anticipatory action system was piloted in the Sudan. In Yemen, FAO expanded coverage of the previously established Food Security Technical Secretariat (FSTS) from 12 governorates to all 22 governorates and established 10 new food security and nutrition Governorate Focal Units (GFUs). A total of 311 government staff in the new GFUs were trained on food security and nutrition and 32 staff were trained on Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). Twelve institutions were trained on early warning systems and 43 weather stations (automatic and manual ones) were rehabilitated through the programme. In addition, a number of regional publications have been issued to generate evidence for programming and advocacy including on the impact of conflict on forests and rangelands, the differential impact of disasters on men and women, the socioeconomic impact of transboundary plant pests and diseases, and the impact of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector.

53. The third work stream is “reducing risks and vulnerability including through addressing animal and plant pests and diseases by adopting a One Health approach.” Pilots of community based DRR interventions have been implemented in Iraq, Syria and Yemen as well as pilot social protection interventions linked to the agriculture sector in Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Six regional projects (with a total budget of USD 18.5 million) have been developed and implemented aiming at combating transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases in the region focusing on Desert Locust, Fall Armyworm, *Xyllela fastidiosa*, Red Palm Weevil, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), *Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR)*, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), and Rift Valley Fever (RVF). In addition, the regional strategy for sustainable management of transboundary plant pests and diseases in the Near East and North Africa region has been finalized and published online in English and Arabic.

54. The fourth work stream “enhance preparedness and emergency response capacities” is reflected in the emergency response projects which are underway in all seven crisis or conflicted affected countries in the region and constitute 72 percent of the total regional portfolio during the biennium. A successful initiative was implemented in 2021 in the Sudan where 13 local administrative leaders from North Darfur state in the Sudan were trained in conflict resolution by the University of El Fasher’s Peace Institute in collaboration with FAO. At community level, natural resource management and peacebuilding committees have been established to support community-level peace processes. These committees are also being supported to develop peacebuilding consultative frameworks. Furthermore, water yards are being rehabilitated with the aim of reducing scarcity and associated disputes. So far, three dialogues have been held to find lasting solutions to farmer-herder conflicts in Eyal Amin, Gabir (Tiwasha locality) and Brouch (Ummkadada locality), and the demarcation of livestock routes is ongoing. These interventions have improved prospects for collaboration and natural resource sharing for more resilient livelihoods in North and East Darfur.

55. Finally, under the “strengthening resilience programming” workstream, gender mainstreaming in resilience programmes was supported, including through the identification and dissemination of two best practices in women’s leadership in community-level disaster risk reduction and resilience building. Regional capacity building and awareness raising trainings were held on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Conflict Sensitivity.

III. Highlights from the field programme

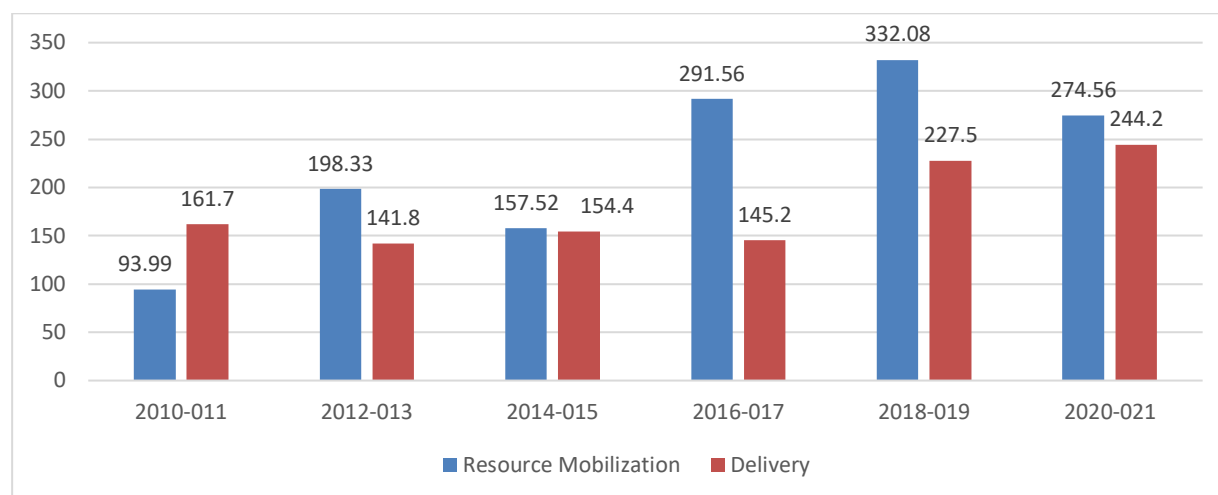
56. An analysis of resource mobilization performance until 30 September 2021 revealed the following:

- significant increase from about USD 94 million in 2010-2011 to USD 274.56 million. The resources mobilized in 2020-2021 are 22 percent more than the average for the period since 2010 (USD 224.7 million) as shown in the Figure below;
- noticeable and steady growth and diversification in the portfolio of Resource Partners. The World Bank, European Union, UN agencies and funds, the Green Climate Fund and the United States of America are the top-five Resource Partners during the 2020- 2021 biennium;
- despite the negative impact caused by COVID-19 on resource mobilization in the first half of 2020, resource mobilization had increased significantly since then; and
- about 47 percent of the projects initiated in 2020-2021 are responding to emergency needs. These projects amount to approximately 72 percent of total resources mobilized during the biennium.

57. All projects are well-aligned with the Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) and contributing to the five FAO Strategic Objectives and Corporate Outputs with varying degrees. Moreover, FAO field programmes showed a quick response to COVID-19. About 31 percent of the new projects initiated during the biennium 2020-2021 (about 17 percent of the total resources) are

responding, to varying degrees, to the pandemic. Ways of working and implementation arrangements have been adjusted to address challenges caused by the pandemic.

58. The total delivery during the 2020-2021 biennium amounted to USD 244.2 million, a 7 percent increase from the previous biennium and 36 percent above the average since 2010-2011 (USD 179.1 million).



IV. Gaps and lessons learned

59. In December 2020, RNE established a task force of staff from Regional, Subregional and Country Offices to work out recommendations and concrete actions to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of FAO work in the NENA region, with a focus on Regional and Subregional Offices. This exercise was performed in alignment with the ongoing corporate Country Office Transformation review process.

60. NENA is a diverse region with different requirements in terms of support from Regional and Subregional Offices, but the RNE/SROs technical and operational resources are stretched. The regional programme must find the right balance between supporting Country Offices in achieving impact in areas of focus and serving the Regional Office's functions related to regional policy dialogues, knowledge management, regional assessments and servicing the Regional Conference.

61. FAO transformation at country and regional levels is a work in progress. The ability to pool regional and subregional resources in support of country programmes is a major strength that should be kept and reinforced. Also, the new working modalities following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic have enabled more integrated collaboration between Country, Subregional, Regional Offices and headquarters, and a more teamwork-oriented approach across the region could be built on this new development.